News release

World Met Day

23 March 2006

Every year thousands of people are affected by natural disasters. But two leading international experts said today that working with organisations such as the Met Office helps them mitigate the impacts of disasters.

Professor Laban A Ogallo, director of the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) in Kenya, and Filipe Lúcio, National Director of Mozambique's meteorological service (INAM), were speaking as weather services around the world celebrated World Meteorological Day - which has the theme Preventing and Mitigating Natural Disasters.

Parts of Africa are facing major droughts, but with the help of the Met Office, ICPAC was able to warn people three months in advance.

ICPAC is responsible for passing on weather and climate information to the individual national weather services in the Greater Horn of Africa. Much of that information comes to ICPAC through collaborations with international meteorological organisations - including the Met Office.

Professor Ogallo said: "This year, using information from the seasonal forecasts of the Met Office - among others - we were able to provide a three-month early warning."

Richard Graham, Met Office long-range forecaster, explained: "We produce global and regional forecasts that look up to six months ahead - including forecasts for rainy seasons in Africa - which are made available to regional centres such as ICPAC."

Professor Ogallo continued: "We don't have the capacity to forecast globally or out to 10 days and beyond. Those that do - such as the Met Office - are the best in the world. That information drives the input into our regional climate forecasts - it is vital for day-to-day operations.

"Without collaboration it would be really difficult for the small national meteorological services like those in Africa to operate effectively."

ICPAC also works closely with climate change scientists at the Met Office's Hadley Centre.

Professor Ogallo said: "We need climate change information in order to provide guidance regarding the potential actions in risk areas."

Early warnings are also vital in Mozambique, which is highly vulnerable to natural disasters such as droughts, floods and tropical cyclones.

In 2000, 700 people died after a tropical cyclone caused devastating floods. As a result INAM took a closer look at the effectiveness of its early warnings.

Traditionally INAM has used the radio and newspapers as the main channels to issue warnings. But the quality of the radio signal is poor in rural areas and newspapers are only read by a small percentage of the population.

It was recommended that weather information also be broadcast on national TV. INAM set up a Media Weather Presentation Studio with a system donated by the Met Office. Their presenters received training from a Met Office graphics designer and professional presenters from CBC (Canada), the BBC and CNN.

Fig1 Standing in front of the blue screen

Fig2 Presentation studio

Mr Lucio said it has proved successful: "The appreciation and use of meteorological information and warnings has markedly increased. On 5 January this year a tropical depression in the Mozambique Channel was threatening to affect the southern province of Gaza. On the basis of warnings issued by INAM, people in the town of Xai-Xai evacuated to safer areas and/or adopted measures to minimise the impact."

Gill Ryall, Head of International Relations at the Met Office, said: "World Met Day gives us an opportunity to celebrate the unique international cooperation between national met. services. Many countries rely on the Met Office's forecasting skills to help provide weather warnings, whilst we use observations from these countries to help us forecast for the UK."

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